

chapter 1: community identity & neighborhood involvement

04-01-2009 DRAFT



Figures 19 and 20: A well-designed gateway element can help brand the BIS Neighborhood to the greater Bluffton community.



The future of the Town of Bluffton depends largely on having healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. Creating a sense of community begins with resident initiative and participation. Stakeholders must be engaged in the planning and implementation process. The community must encourage cooperative efforts between the public and private entities responsible for implementing plan recommendations.

The more recent subdivisions and planned communities that surround the BIS Neighborhood have an inherent identity through their establishments as planned communities. The ancillary property owners associations and branding identity further reinforce these legally defined neighborhoods.

The BIS Neighborhood suffers from a lack of a visible identity. For example, the community does not have a defined entry with a gate house and sign. There is no public amenity or destination within the neighborhood with which it can be associated. There is no consistent architectural theme or historic period to unify the community. Finally, there is no property owners association to help unite and represent the BIS Neighborhood to the Town, County, general public, or residents.

The BIS Neighborhood would benefit from an inclusive

neighborhood organization for communication by all property owners and residents. This could start by expanding the existing Neighborhood Association.

A neighborhood organization is an officially recognized organization for a specific geographic location in which every resident and business within the neighborhood is a voting member. Neighborhood organizations work to reflect the issues and concerns of its members. Neighborhood organizations also have the legal standing to represent the neighborhood to the Town on a variety of issues including land-use and zoning, traffic, parks, and other issues that directly affect a neighborhood's livability.

The Town Council is committed to ensuring that this community-based energy and interest is used productively in municipal decision-making. This is especially important in land-use planning. The Town works with the neighborhood organizations to encourage early participation in the public review process, an open dialogue between applicants and neighborhoods, and improving communications between the development community, citizens, and Town government. This forum would provide the ideal setting to ensure the BIS Neighborhood Plan is

properly implemented.

A neighborhood watch program would also help unite residents by working with law enforcement to keep a trained eye and ear on their community. The program teaches citizens how to help themselves by identifying and reporting suspicious activity in their neighborhood. The social interaction and "watching out for each other" camaraderie tends to strengthen communities and is at the heart of most successful neighborhood watch programs.

Neighborhood watches share one essential concept: bringing community members together to re-establish control of their neighborhoods, promoting an increased quality of life, and reducing the crime rate in the area. The adjacent community of Hidden Lakes recently started its own neighborhood watch program, and residents say that they feel safer, and that the program has provided a social network which has strengthened their neighborhood.



Figure 21: Typical community policing programs that could benefit the BIS Neighborhood.

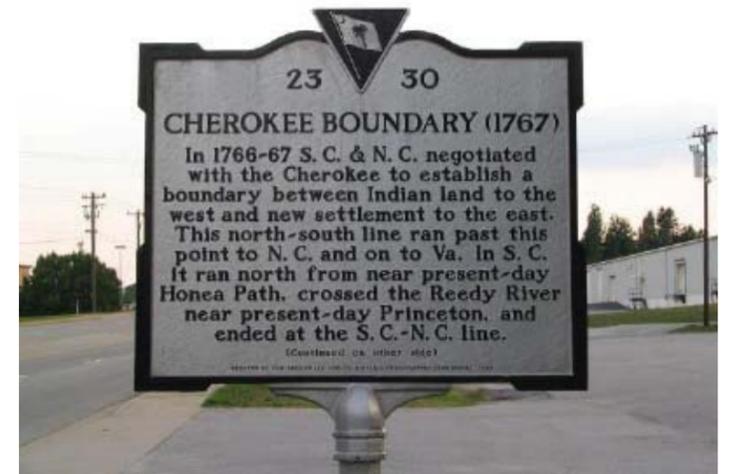


Figure 22: An example of historic signage being used to identify important features.

Community events add to the spirit and vitality of neighborhoods and provide an opportunity for residents to socialize. For generations, block parties have served as a way for neighbors to meet each other. Some block parties are organized around holidays such as the 4th of July or Labor Day, while others may start because of an issue affecting the neighborhood.

The neighborhood organization can help establish the first Buck Island Simonsville community event. The new middle school will make an ideal location for such an event due to its size and central location.

Due to the lack of neighborhood identity, a branding exercise that includes a name and image package is a recommendation for the Buck Island Simonsville Neighborhood to consider. Branding is about building affinity for a neighborhood. For a neighborhood brand to be relevant, the brand must flow from the neighborhood itself. The brand identity must focus on the strengths of the community and be understood by the greater Bluffton community.

Another method to help establish neighborhood identity is the creation of a neighborhood gateway. This can be done by creating an entry structure or a distinguishing sign in conjunction with other aesthetic features to emphasize the residential neighborhood. BIS residents have identified the May River Road/Buck Island Road intersection as one gateway. The Bluffton Parkway intersections of Simonsville and Buck Island roads have also been identified as potential gateways into the BIS Neighborhood. A simple monument sign with appropriate landscaping would go a long way in identifying and branding the BIS Neighborhood. The gateway should be a high-quality design that reflects the character of the residential neighborhood (based on branding initiative.) The Bluffton Parkway and Buck Island gateway is also an opportunity to coordinate with Beaufort County to properly screen the refuse facility so that the Neighborhood's entrance is not such an unfriendly eyesore. **Figure 24 shows some examples.**

These gateways might reduce cut-through traffic, as well. Typically, motorists frustrated by congestion on major arterial and collector roadways will seek shortcuts or less congested routes. By providing these high quality gateway features on Bluffton Parkway and May River Road, some cut-through traffic may be discouraged.



Figure 23: Neighborhood events help strengthen communities.

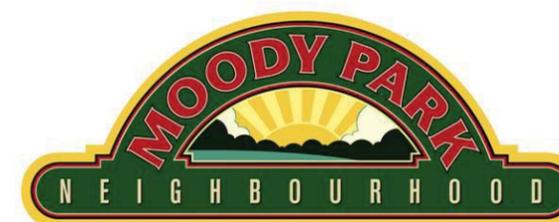


Figure 24: After a branding campaign, new street signs can help reinforce a neighborhood's image and promote the community's identity.

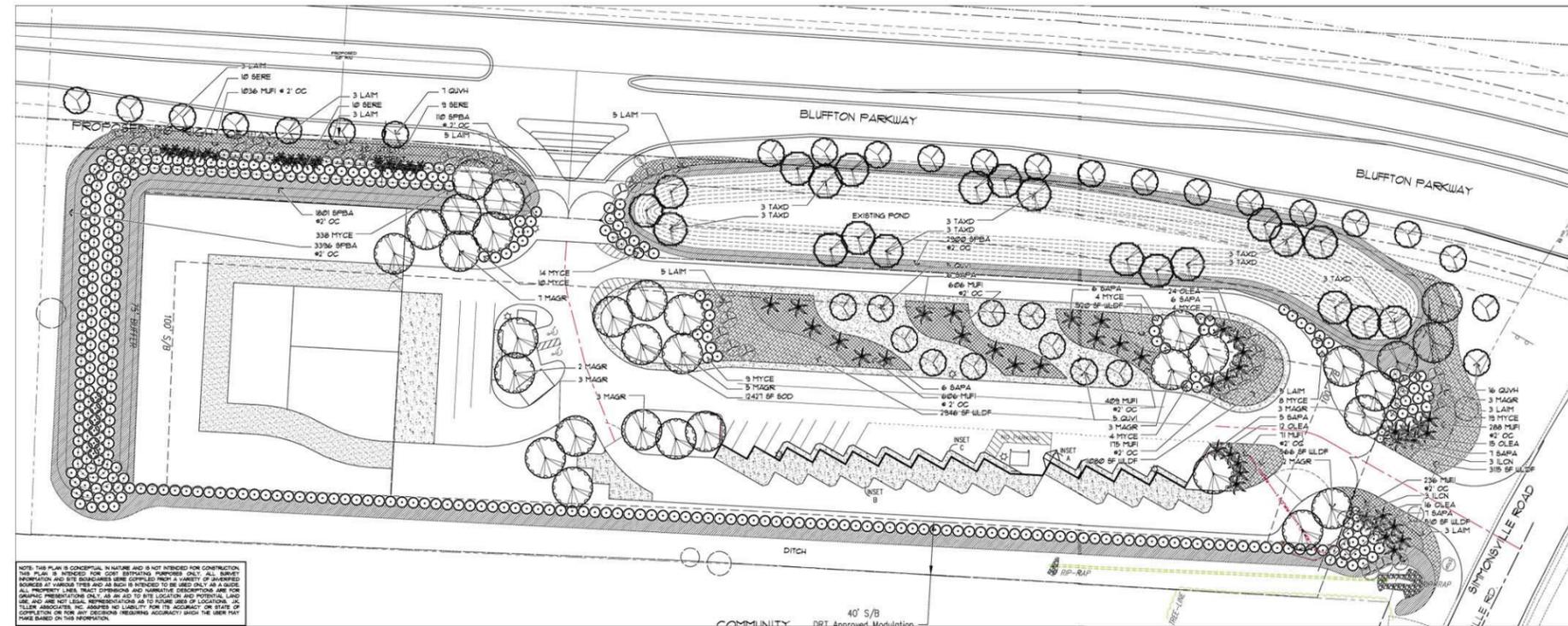


Figure 25: Screen Planting Plan for County Recycling and Refuse Center from JK Tiller Associates, Inc.

community identity & neighborhood involvement recommendations

Develop working groups for each of the Plan elements	AC, PO, TOB
Hold a public meeting every quarter to review and discuss plan implementation status	AC, PO, TOB
Establish Buck Island Simmonsville as the Town's first official Neighborhood Organization	AC, PO, TOB
Coordinate with the Bluffton Historical Society to identify historic resources (land, structures, events) and promote the local history via markers	BHS, PO
Through a branding process, develop an image package for Buck Island Simmonsville including logo, colors, and tag line	AC, PO, TOB
Reinforce the community boundaries and branding image by installing entry signage and beautification at identified gateway locations	AC, PO, TOB
Install new street signs with the BIS logo/image	TOB, BC
Develop a template for a BIS Neighborhood website and give content control and management to the Neighborhood Organization	TOB, NO
The Neighborhood Organization and the new middle school should adopt Buck Island and Simmonsville roads for regular trash pickups	NO, BCSD
Establish an annual BIS event that highlights the heritage and diversity of the Neighborhood	NO
Establish partnerships with Eagles Field and the middle school to positively integrate these facilities into the Neighborhood	AC, PO, TOB, EF, BCSD
Screen the County refuse facility to create a more aesthetic gateway for the Neighborhood	BC, TOB
Establish a neighborhood cleanup program with community association that allows residents to dispose of white goods and other hazardous household items	TOB, NO

KEY:

AC-Advisory Committee; BC-Beaufort County; BCSD-Beaufort County School District; BHS-Bluffton Historical Society; EF-Eagles Field; NO-Neighborhood Organization; PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

chapter 2: natural resources

The Town of Bluffton has a variety of forests and woodland types, and the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood is a prime example of such variety.

These natural features offer many great benefits to the Town and the surrounding areas. Specifically, the forested areas are comprised of both Pinewoods and Hardwood Bottom Wetlands. These forest types provide a wide range of habitats and many opportunities for a variety of plant and animal species, some of which may be endangered. **Figure 28 identifies the areas of wetlands in the BIS Neighborhood.**

Preserving large tracts of habitat, such as the one in the BIS Neighborhood, helps prevent species isolation and extinction. In addition to the other ecological benefits of the forested areas, one of the most important is providing surface water cleansing. The forests and wetlands help clean stormwater before it leaves the BIS Neighborhood. Wetlands are one of the best environments to mitigate flooding, clean stormwater, and provide groundwater recharging.

The BIS Neighborhood is situated in the May River and Colleton River watersheds so any trash, pollution,

or toxins in the BIS Neighborhood will flow into one of these treasured rivers (see **Figure 29**).

Preserving high-quality water in the area is critical to preserving shell fishing, fishing, recreation, and drinking water for Town residents. Without the forests and wetlands to clean the surface water, oysters, crabs, and fish would not only become unfit for human consumption due to pollutants, but many species would die off. The impacts of forest and wetland losses would be devastating to the fishing industry and the traditional way of life in the Lowcountry.

There may also be opportunities for developers to allow Town staff or non-profit organizations to remove native plants in areas that will be cleared for development. Any plants that are removed could be used in public parks, along pathways, or other Town owned property.



Figure 26: Typical forested wetland during dry season

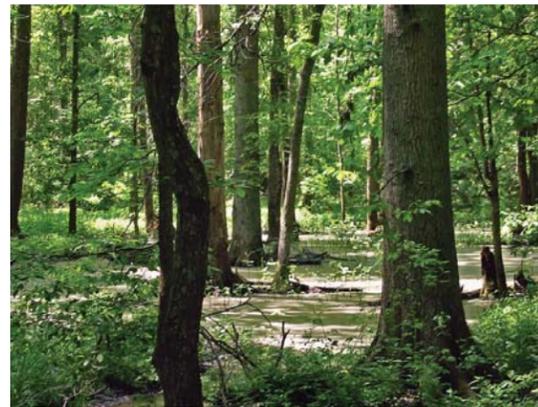


Figure 27: Typical forested wetland during wet season

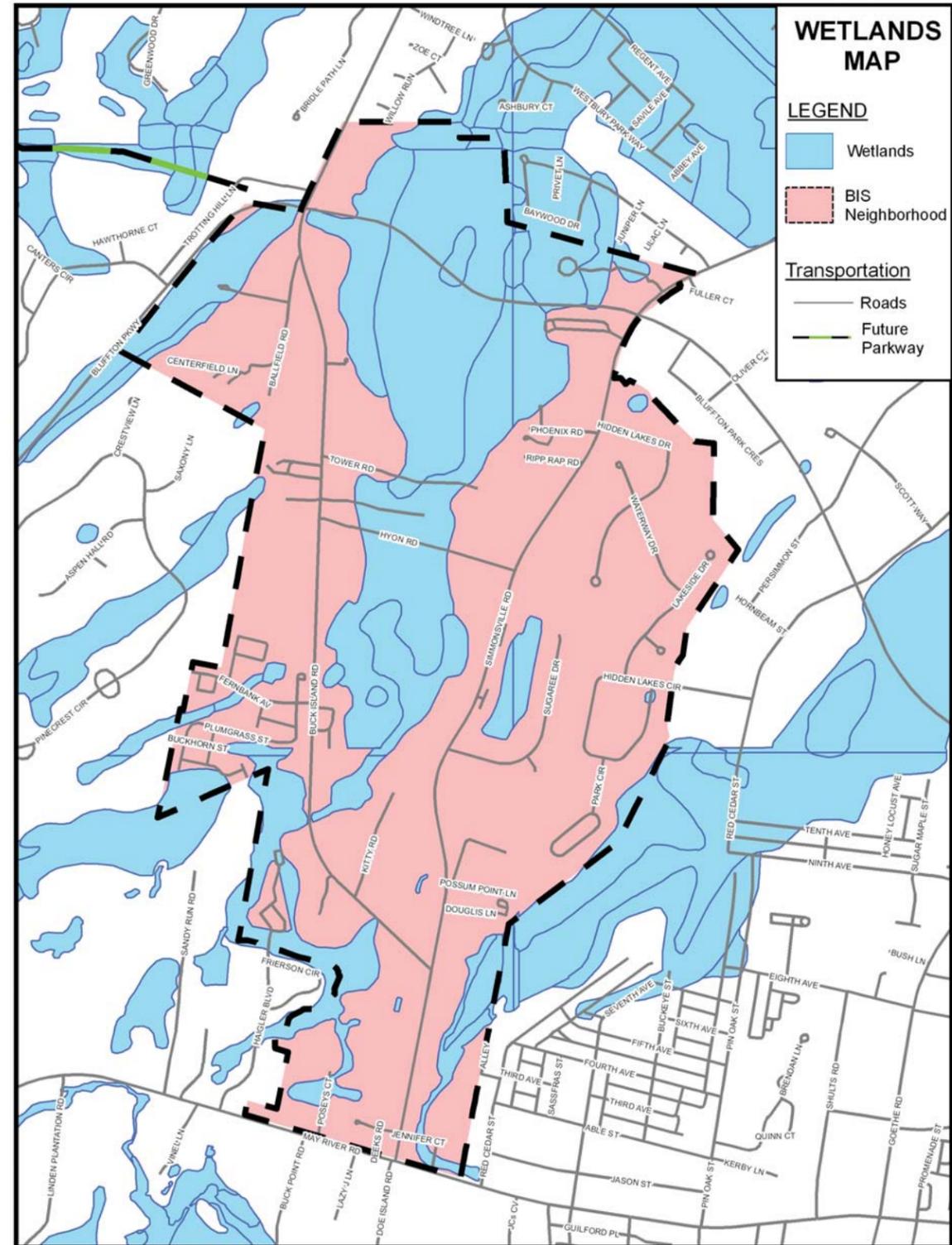


Figure 28: Map of wetlands in the BIS Neighborhood.

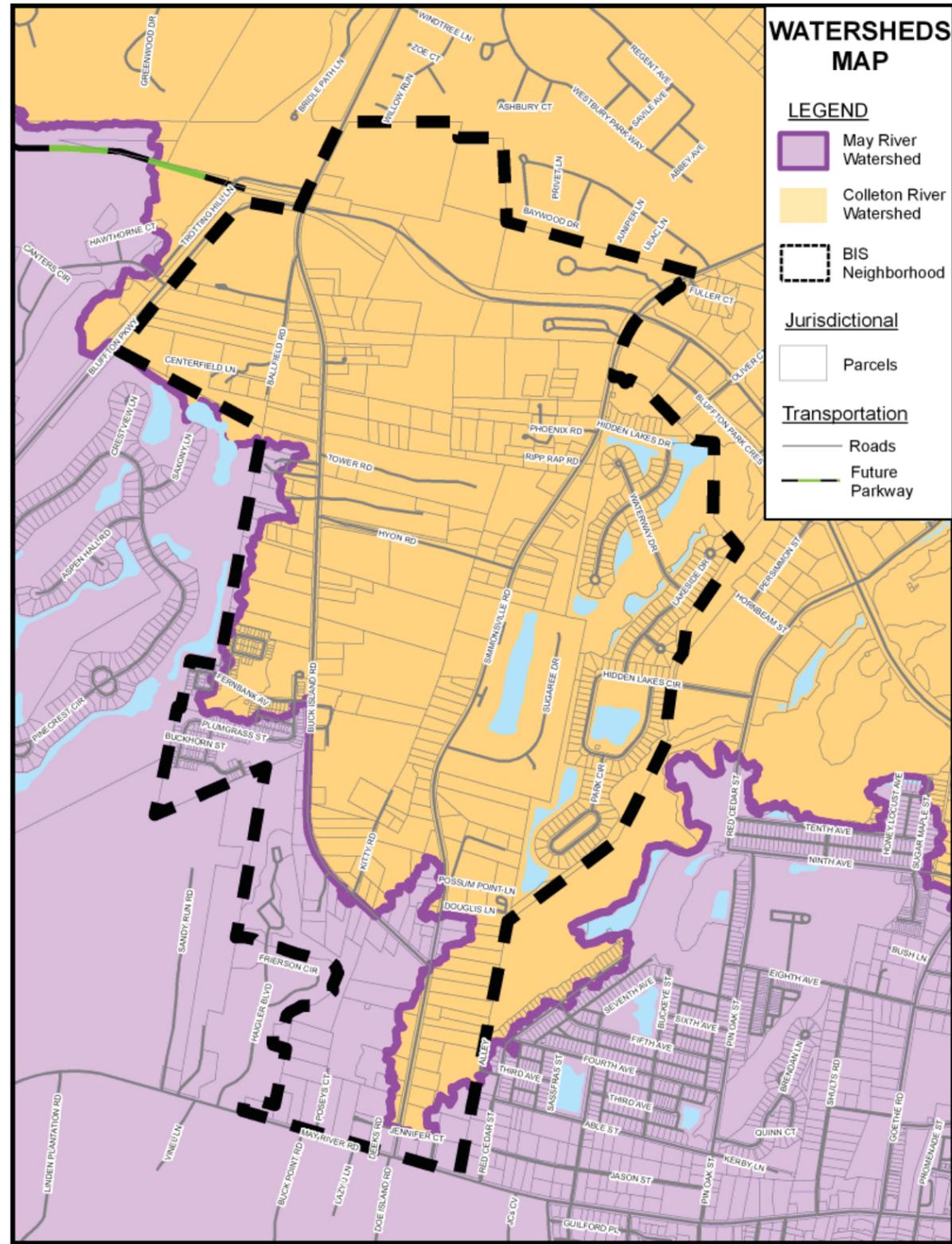


Figure 29: BIS Watershed Map.

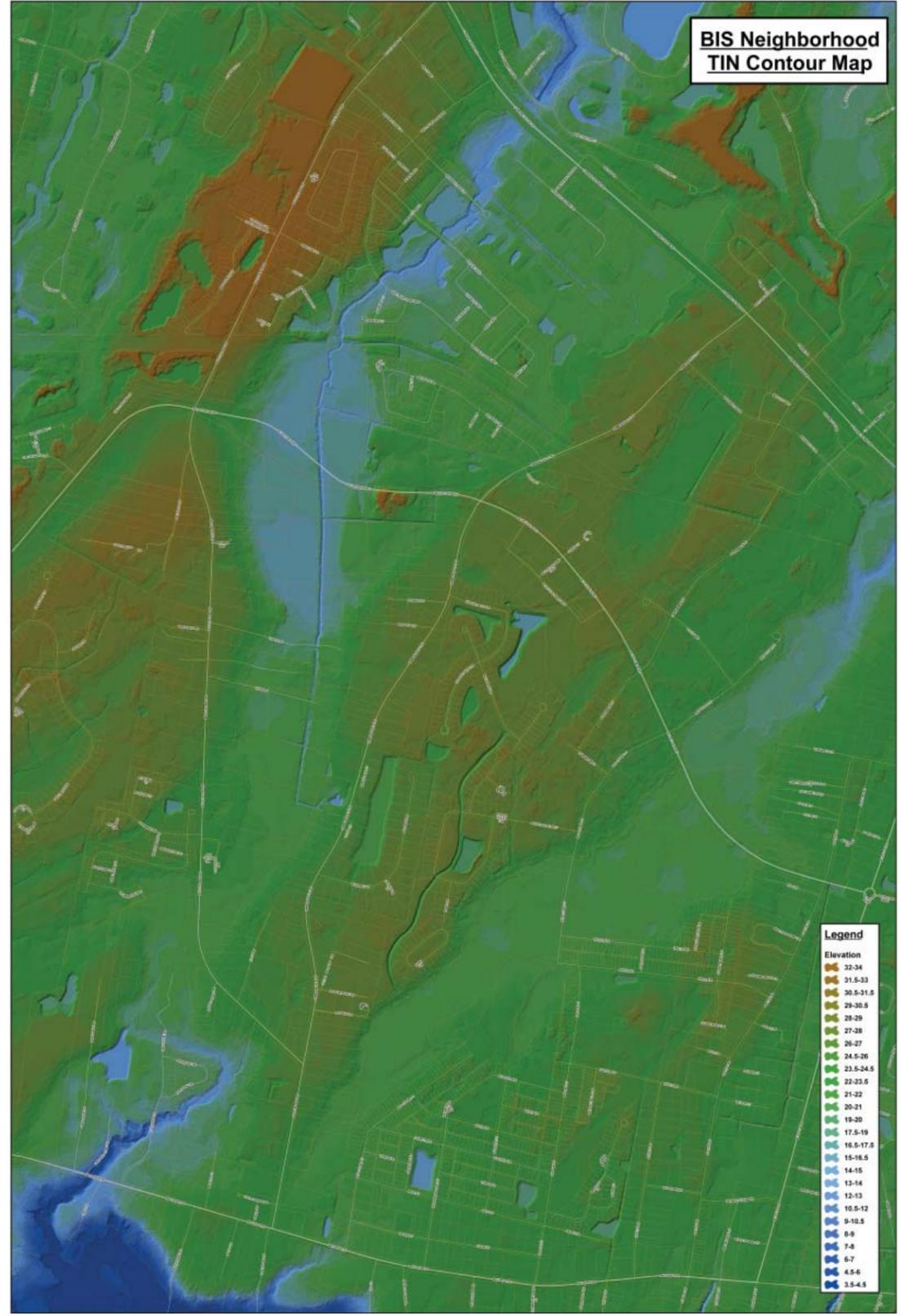


Figure 30: BIS Contour Map.



Figure 31: Example of the abundant tree canopy in the Neighborhood.



Figure 32: Bluffton has many beautiful waterways.



Figure 33: Mature oak trees are found throughout BIS.

The abundant tree canopy also offers great aesthetic value not only to the BIS Neighborhood, but also to the Town as a whole. The significant tree canopy and forested portions of the BIS Neighborhood provide important plant and wildlife habitat. The trees are an asset to the community because they provide summer shade and cooling, help to slow stormwater runoff, reduce noise, and improve local air quality. Large, mature trees throughout the community also help to screen views of adjacent areas and properties, offering privacy for residential properties.

A new Tree Ordinance is currently being drafted, which will include measures to help preserve existing tree canopy in residential neighborhoods. The BIS Neighborhood is a great example of an area that needs to protect the magnificent tree canopy from future development and land disturbance activities.

The BIS Neighborhood is unique in that it contains a large amount of natural resources, while being located in the center of the Town. The Neighborhood has, for the most part, retained the Lowcountry character of its historic roots. However, there is a growing amount of pressure for development in the area, and many of the traditional ways of building around large trees and critical areas are being threatened. It is important to preserve the existing natural resources to maintain habitat, preserve the traditional way of life, clean water, and preserve the aesthetics of the Lowcountry.

Many properties in the BIS Neighborhood rely on septic tanks for both homes and businesses. A recent study was done in the area and found a substantial amount of leaking septic tanks or failing septic fields. Raw sewage leaking out into the environment not only presents environmental hazards, but it also makes life uncomfortable for residents. There is an obvious need to connect properties to a sewer system, which is currently underway. Once the sewer system is fully installed, the environmental damage of leakage will stop, while improving the quality-of-life for those currently relying on malfunctioning septic systems.

A new drainage system will also be installed along the main roads. There are many problems with the existing stormwater drainage, as can be seen by the flooded ditches, yards, and roads. Improvements made to the drainage will help increase quality of life, improve safety, and help protect the environment. Standing water not only damages properties and poses safety threats, but it is also a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other disease carrying insects.



Figure 35: Failing septic tank.



Figure 36: Trash scattered throughout a yard.



Figure 34: Stockpiled equipment and building supplies.



Figure 37: Disposed concrete and other scrap building materials are stockpiled on this Buck Island property.

The future vision for the Neighborhood will provide for an environmental setting that enhances the quality of life for local residents. Preservation of natural resources, keeping open spaces and wildlife corridors connected, and revisions to Town development standards to encourage environmentally friendly development will benefit the long-term ecological health of the region. Some future natural resources concerns include increased development pressure, aging utilities and infrastructure, and an increase in population in the area. In order to protect the forests, wetlands, tree canopy, and other natural resources of the Neighborhood, the Town will work with future developers to preserve as much of BIS as possible. A balance must be achieved between the desire to maintain the benefits of a mature tree canopy, while alleviating some of the maintenance and financial burden to individual property owners. Development tools such as cluster development should also be considered to preserve and protect the natural resources in the Neighborhood.

Figures 38-A-E represent plans and built projects using cluster development principles.

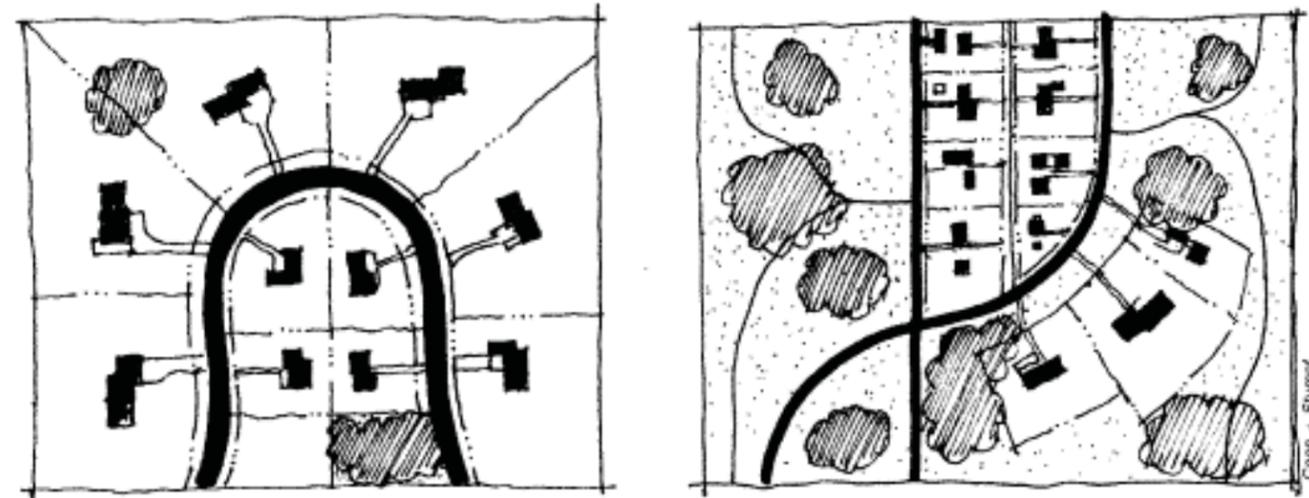


Figure 38-B: Typical development preserves no land (as shown on the left), while cluster development can protect important natural resources (as shown on the right).



Figure 38-A: Cluster development can provide very attractive housing options, while preserving critical lands and community open space.

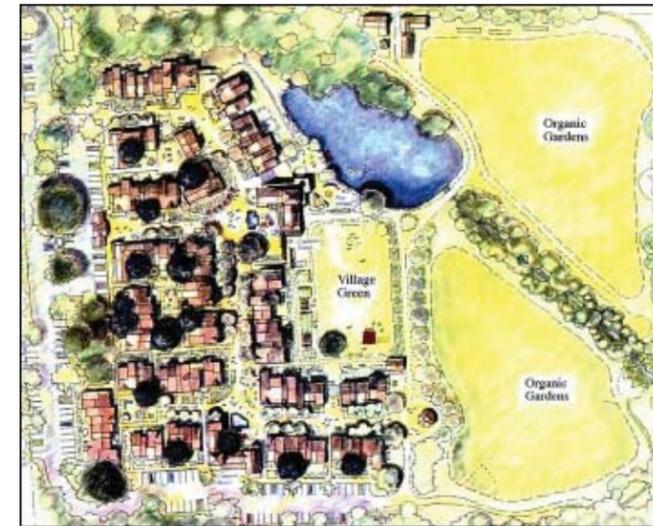


Figure 38-C: Cluster development provides additional room for other activities. In this example, land is preserved for organic gardening.



Figure 38-D: Cluster development offers abundant open space for residential use.



Figure 38-E: Cluster development can have "old town" charm.

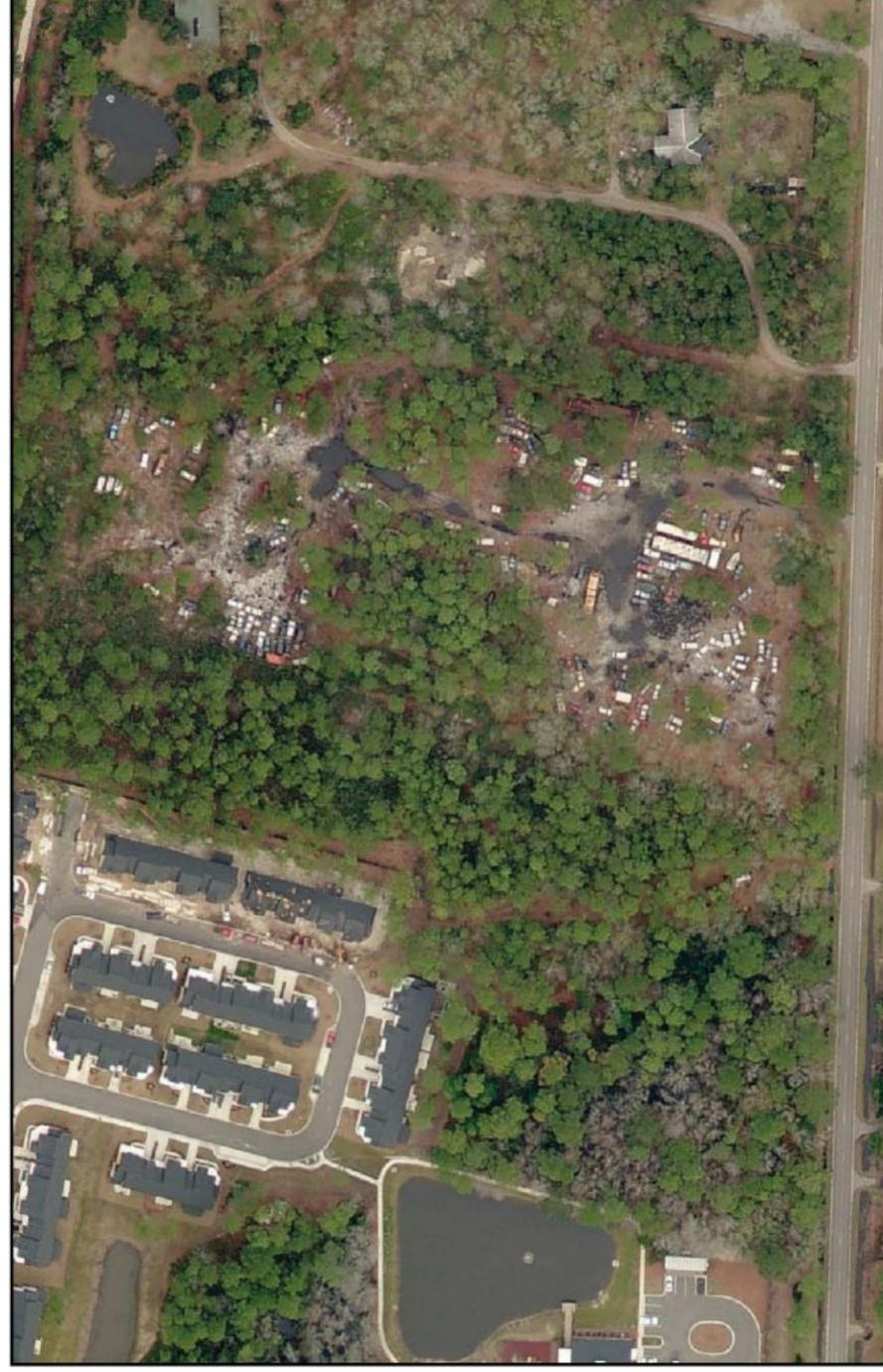


Figure 39-A, B: Abandoned automobiles, trailers, tires, boats, waste, equipment, and building materials pose an environmental hazard to the neighborhood.

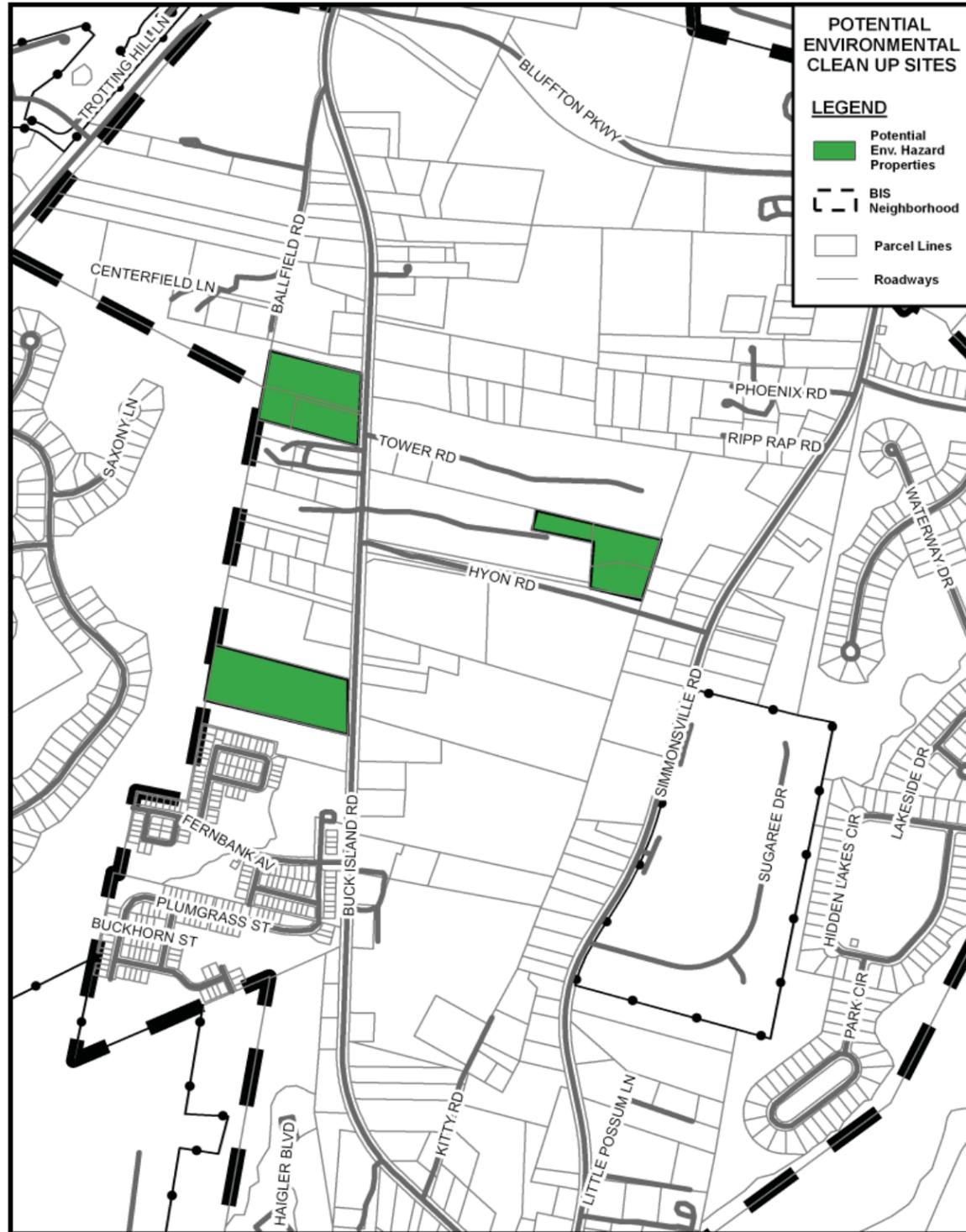


Figure 40: Areas that have stockpiles of refuse that may be environmentally damaging.

natural resources recommendations

Revise the Town of Bluffton Tree Ordinance to include parcels zoned General Residential (GR) to ensure significant trees are preserved	TOB
Establish a Bluffton tree replacement program that provides the Town an opportunity to install new trees on private property	TOB, PO, NO
Remove the abandoned automobiles, tires, building materials, machinery, equipment, and boats from properties that pose environmental risks	PO
Revise zoning code to permit cluster development to avoid ecologically critical areas and preserve rural character	TOB
Improve the existing logging road from Wellstone to HE McCracken Circle as a nature trail/pathway and preserve the adjacent wetlands	TOB, PO, Pincrest POA
Provide assistance to residents in preserving tree health	TOB, PO
Provide septic maintenance program for those with failing septic systems	TOB
Eliminate septic systems and wells by providing upgraded utilities in the area	TOB
Improve the County's dirt roads to prevent erosion and sedimentation	BC, PO

KEY:
 AC-Advisory Committee; BC-Beaufort County; BCSD-Beaufort County School District; NO-Neighborhood Organization;
 PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

chapter 3: planning, zoning, & development

04-01-2009 DRAFT

The term land use describes the kind of uses (residential, commercial, industrial, etc.) found on a parcel of land. The Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood contains a variety of land uses as dictated by previous growth and zoning patterns in place while under the jurisdiction of Beaufort County. The primary land use type in the BIS Neighborhood is a mix of low-density residential and medium-density residential. **Land uses within the community can be seen in Figure 41.**

In Bluffton, Low-density residential is defined as a range of densities from one dwelling unit per three acres to one dwelling unit per acre. Medium-density residential can range from one to three units per acre, usually consisting of single-family homes. Multi-family homes may be permitted as long as the overall allowed density is not exceeded. According to the Town's Comprehensive Plan, medium-density residential uses are proposed for the BIS Neighborhood. Existing medium-density residential



Figure 42: In Bluffton, this scale would be considered High Density residential.

areas within the BIS Neighborhood include areas such as Wellstone, Windy Lakes, and Hidden Lakes.

Industrial and commercial uses are largely confined to the southern portion of the community, around and south of the Buck Island and Simmonsville roads intersection. A mixed-use property that is not yet developed, known as the Southeastern Development Property, lies along Simmonsville Road near the center portion of the Neighborhood. Adjacent to this property is the recently sited and approved Bluffton Middle School, a property which encompasses nearly 5% of the Neighborhood. In 1980, Beaufort County located a garbage transfer site at what is now the southwestern corner of the intersection of Simmonsville Road and Bluffton Parkway. A ball field is located on the northern edge of the community, at the intersection of Buck Island Road and Bluffton Parkway.



Figure 43: In Bluffton, this scale would be considered Medium Density Residential.



Figure 44: In Bluffton, this scale would be considered Low Density Residential.

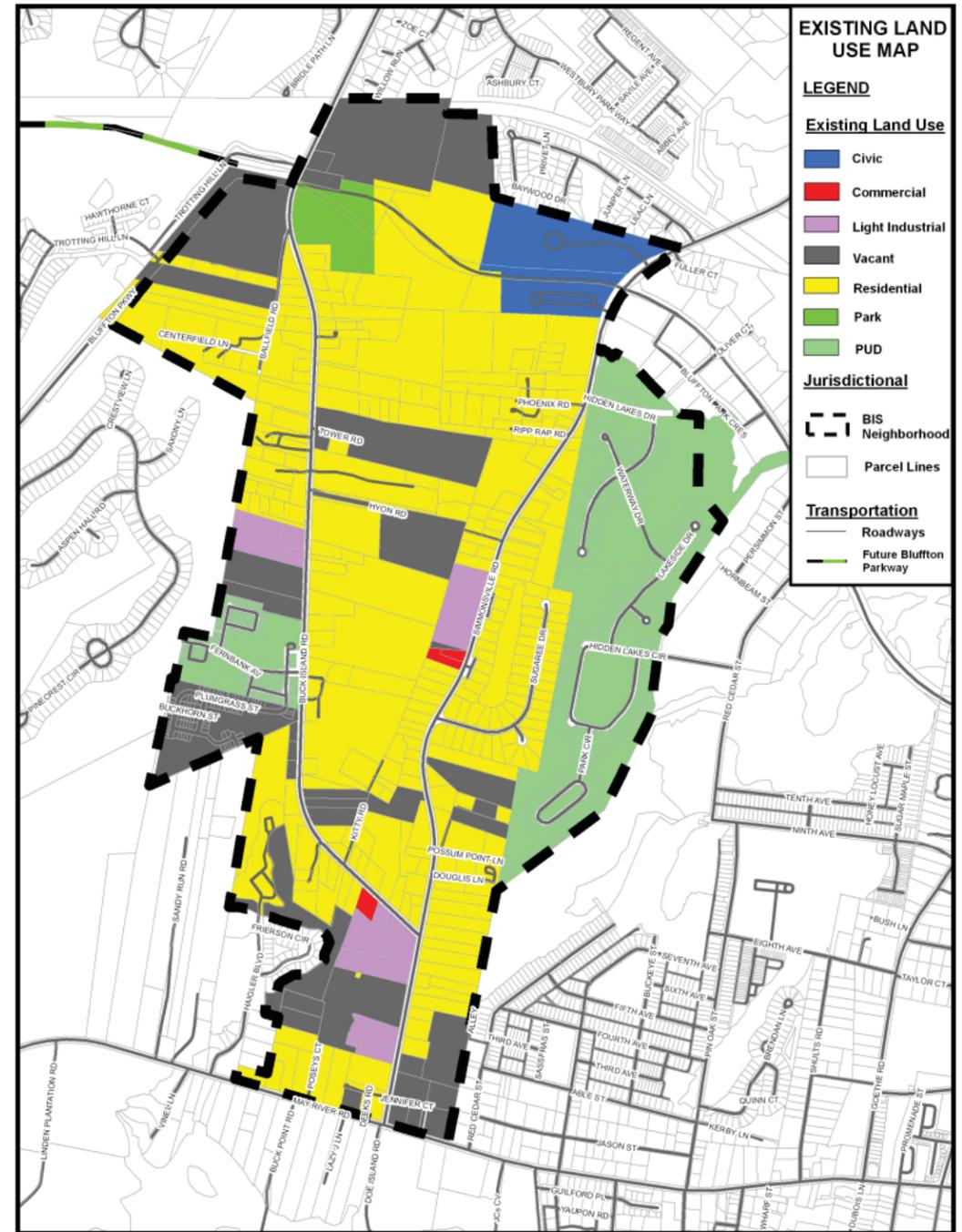


Figure 41: Existing Land Use map.

Zoning is a tool that allows the Town to guide development by regulating the physical form and kinds of uses on a parcel of land. These controls are based upon the need to prevent overcrowding of land, congestion on the streets, undue concentration of population, and the mixing of incompatible land uses. More importantly, zoning provides a basis for guiding and ordering the pattern of future development. The study area is primarily a residential community, thus 85% of the area is zoned residential, 10% commercial, 4% industrial, and 1% mixed-use.

There are currently four zoning districts within the Buck Island Simmonsville Neighborhood:

general residential (GR)

The General Residential District is designed to provide for a variety of low-density, residential uses, including single-family, two (2) or three (3) family, and manufactured home dwellings. The intent of the District is to provide areas primarily for residential uses, and to discourage any encroachment by uses which may be incompatible with such residential use.

light industrial (LI)

The purpose of this District is to provide a suitable environment for uses generally classified as research and development, assembly, high technology production, precision manufacturing, and light industry. The LI District excludes heavy manufacturing operations which tend to be more objectionable to the community, and industries which are less clean. Industries in the LI District are required to have high performance standards with minimal hazardous waste, air and water pollution, and other off-site nuisances.

village commercial (VC)

The purpose of this District is to encourage the formation and continuance of a healthy environment for commercial uses that are located and sized so as to provide nearby residential areas with convenient shopping and service facilities. Another purpose is to promote the location of a mixture of housing types and prices and stores/offices/workplaces in close proximity to each other to provide a balanced mix of activities, foster a pedestrian-oriented community center, and reduce traffic and parking congestion. Other goals include accommodation of essential public utilities and public safety services,

avoidance of strip highway commercial development, and large regional businesses, or other land uses which might compromise the historic commercial character of the District.

planned unit development (PUD)

The purpose of this District is to encourage flexibility in land planning that will result in improved design, character, and quality of new homogenous and mixed-use developments. Other purposes of the District are to promote the most appropriate use of land, facilitate the provision of streets and utilities, and to preserve open space and the natural and scenic features of the property.

Figure 45 is the current Zoning Map for BIS.

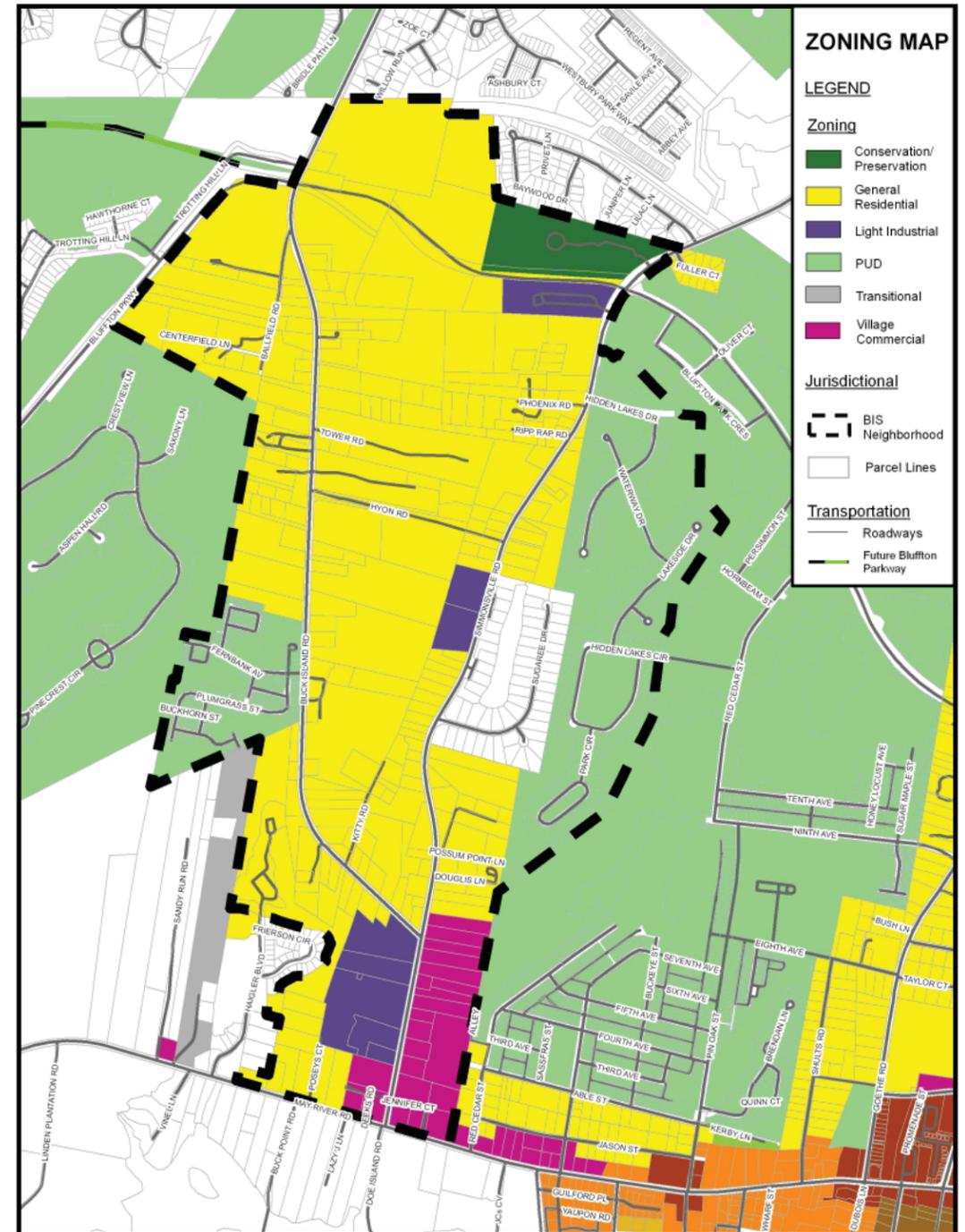


Figure 45: Zoning in BIS.

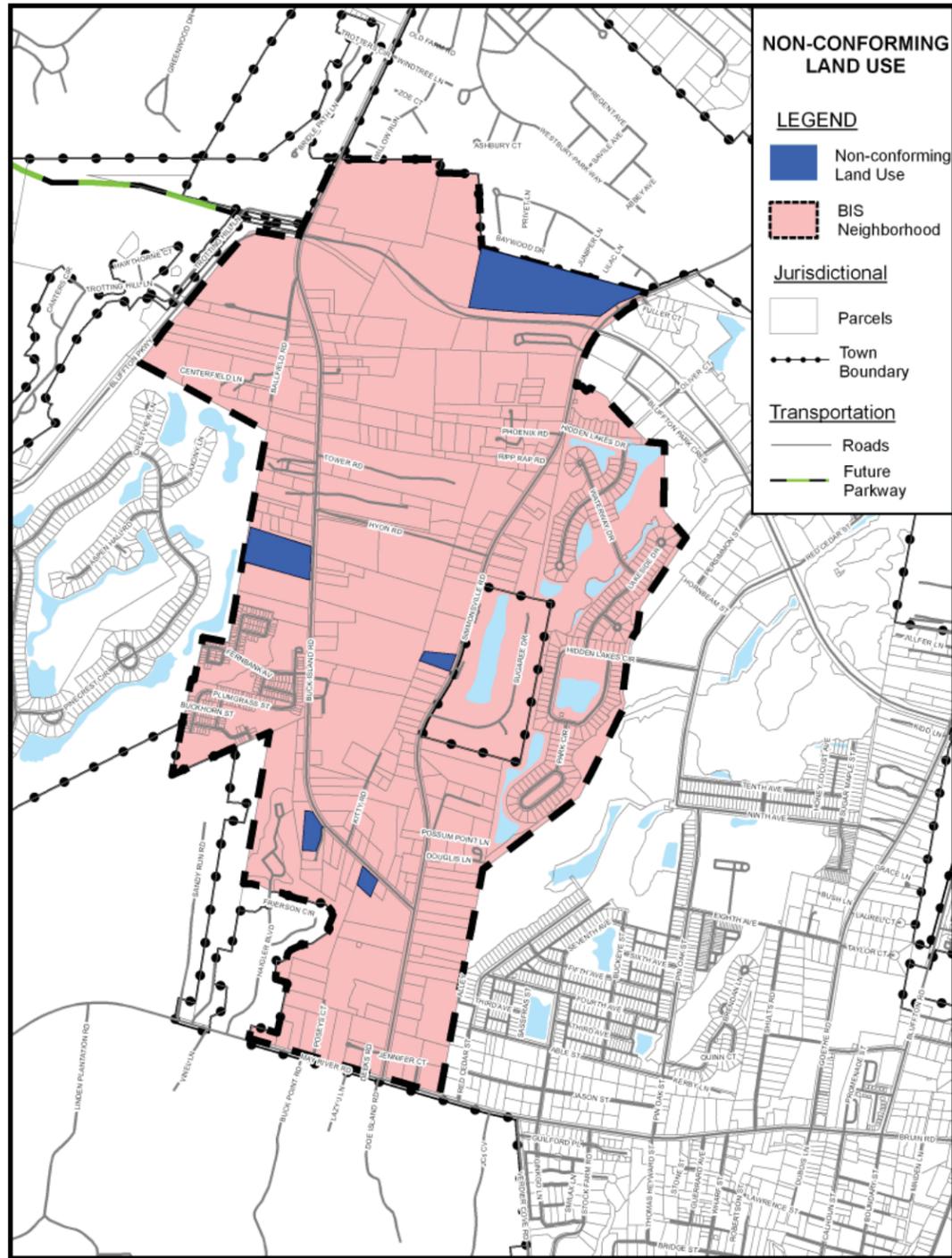


Figure 46: Non-conforming land uses in BIS.

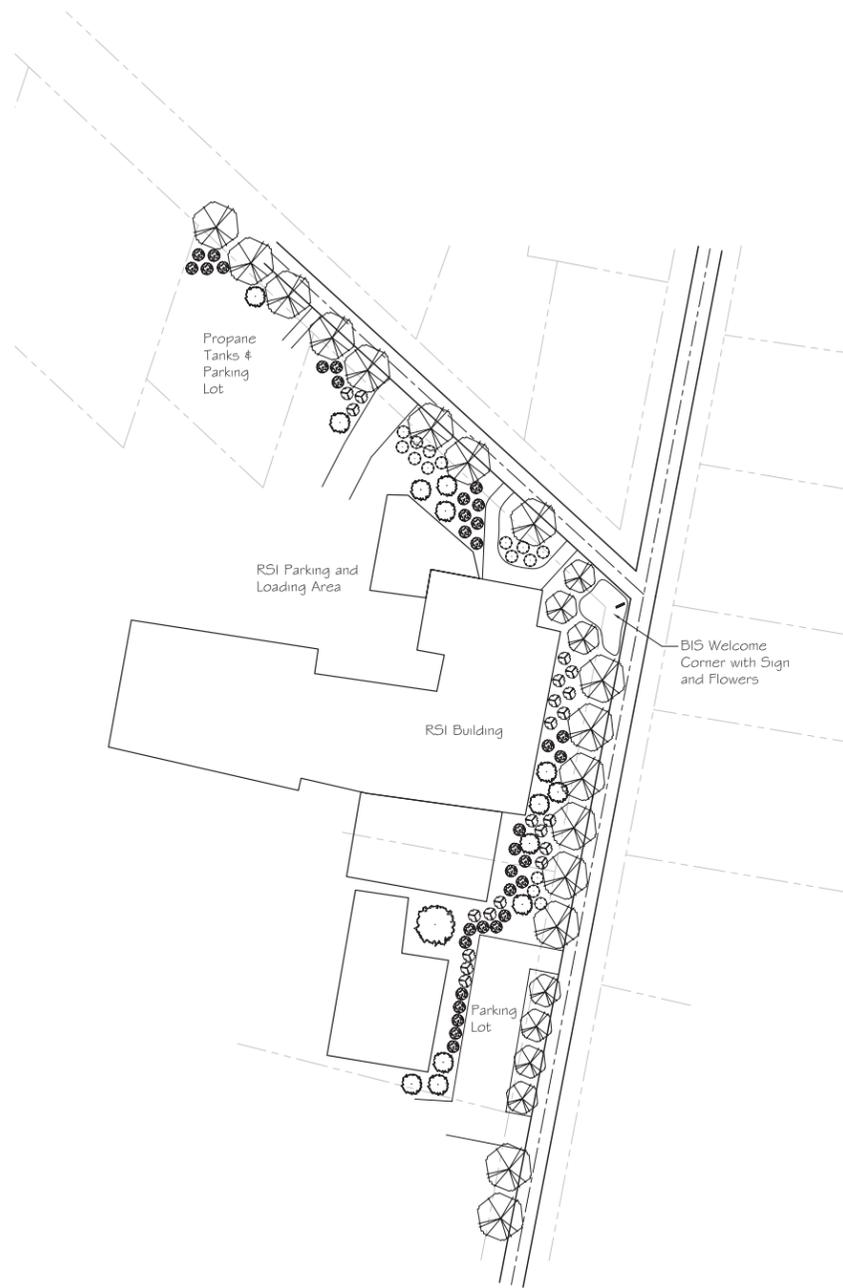


Figure 47: Screening opportunities.

There are many parcels throughout the study area that contain commercial structures despite the fact that the parcels themselves are zoned for residential use. These structures were either in place prior to annexation into the Town and were developed under previous Beaufort County zoning designation or had made considerable progress towards development of the site under the jurisdiction of Beaufort County and hence were allowed to continue towards completion, as a vested right. It should be noted that these non-conforming parcels and the land uses currently occupying them may continue in perpetuity as non-conforming structures and uses as long these structures are not enlarged or the use is not abandoned for a time period of six months or more. The Town should ensure that non-conforming structures and uses are properly screened from adjacent residential uses to alleviate aesthetic incompatibilities. **Figure 46 shows the non-conforming land uses in the Neighborhood.**

Land uses within the Neighborhood can be in conflict with each other. A visual screen can help alleviate these conflicts by providing attractive buffers, as **shown in Figure 47.**

recent development

Within the past few years there has been a surge of development around the Buck Island Simmonsville (BIS) Neighborhood. The three communities within the Neighborhood – Hidden Lakes, Wellstone, and Windy Lakes are all Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) consisting of land plans that are medium-density residential in nature.

PUDs are a common development model in this area, as they offer flexibility in land planning. PUDs also encourage the developer to go above and beyond the requirements of standard zoning.

Another common component of development is a development agreement. Development agreements allow a developer to lock in existing land use regulations for an extended period of time. Many times, development agreements result in a higher level of community amenities. A commitment of funding to provide open space and public infrastructure is also a result of the development agreement process.

The neighboring community to the north, Old Carolina, is also a medium density PUD. The Old Carolina Golf Course was annexed as a part of the Buck Island Simmonsville annexation in 2005. Traditions at Old Carolina, consisting of 134 residential lots, was not annexed and remains a portion of Beaufort County. In 2006, the annexed area was rezoned from General Residential to PUD. The master plan for the annexed portion of Old Carolina allows for 199 apartment units and 55 single family dwelling units.



Figure 48: The Traditions at Old Carolina.

Within the southwestern portion of the study area, the Vista View development is a mixture of 72 low-to-moderate income single and multi-family apartment units and related amenities. This project was phased over several years and maintains a 100% occupancy with a long waiting list. The community is an example of how well-managed, affordable housing apartments can be integrated into a neighborhood without negative impacts.

The adjacent Buckwalter PUD contains over 5,000 acres and is located to the west of the BIS Neighborhood. Pinecrest is the closest neighborhood to BIS and borders the western Neighborhood boundary. To the east of the BIS Neighborhood, commercial development within Bluffton Park has stretched towards the Simmonsville Road and Bluffton Parkway intersection.

Red Cedar Elementary, located within Bluffton Park and adjacent to the Hidden Lakes subdivision, is currently under construction and is projected to open in the fall of 2009.

Bluffton Station, a village commercial scale development, is architecturally designed to reflect the Lowcountry character and to blend in with the surrounding neighborhood. Bluffton Station is located on a 1.7 acre parcel at the northeast corner of Buck Island Road and SC 46. The project will consist of a market store, an eight pump gas station, a 1,336 square foot car wash and pet wash, and six buildings ranging from 900 square feet to 2,000 square feet in size to be used for planned shopping, specialty retail, and professional offices.

This project was well received by the BIS Neighborhood and should be used as a model for future commercial development in the BIS Neighborhood area.

Figure 49 shows an illustrative site plan for Bluffton Station.

Bluffton Middle School, a 142,000 square foot facility located on 41.84 acres in the heart of the BIS Neighborhood, has been sited with the intent of providing a centralized location

for the Town of Bluffton's middle school students who will be attending the new school.

The school site will include recreational facilities such as a basketball court and athletic fields. Other site improvements will include extending Hyon Road to connect Buck Island and Simmonsville roads, providing access to the site from both thoroughfares. Sidewalks are also being installed along Hyon Road for pedestrian access to the school.

Unfortunately, the school's budget did not allow for a more extensive sidewalk or pathway system, so it is imperative that the Town, Beaufort County School District, South Carolina Department of Transportation, and the property owners work together to improve these critical pedestrian connections.

All students attending the school will be given bus service until adequate pedestrian access is constructed. The state has developed a 1.5 mile radius for students who will no longer receive bus service after pedestrian infrastructure is in place. **Figure 50 is the overall site plan for the new Bluffton Middle School site.**



Figure 49: Bluffton Station illustrative site plan.

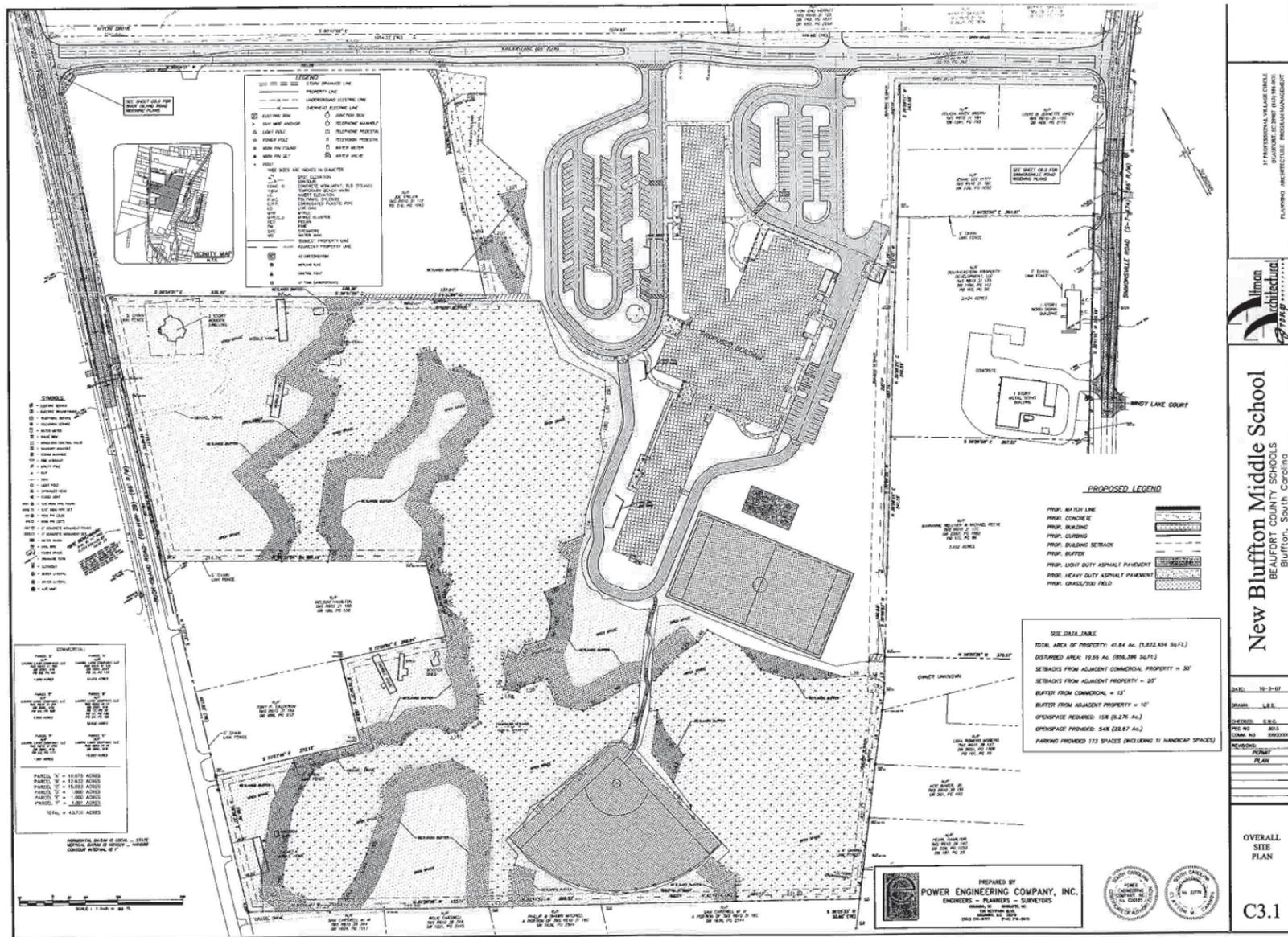


Figure 50: Bluffton Middle School plan

Southeastern Property Development, a mixed-use project adjacent to the Bluffton Middle School site along Simmonsville Road, will have a total of 87,800 square feet of commercial, warehouse, retail, service, and office space within a 6.88 acre site (see Figure 51).

The property was rezoned from Light Industrial (LI) zoning to PUD in February 2008. This project met opposition from local residents who expressed concerns over allowing commercial uses within the central portion of Simmonsville Road corridor, specifically citing concerns over increased traffic on a roadway which already has been considered to be in need of improvements.



Figure 51: Illustrative site plan for the Southeastern Property

future land use

Through the planning process, the majority of the BIS stakeholders prefer that future land uses mimic the current land uses and that zoning be maintained in its current designated configuration. Therefore, commercial, industrial, and large-scale institutional uses should be restricted from the core of the residential portion of the community. Commercial uses should be low-intensity and fit into the context of the BIS Neighborhood's scale with small signage and neighborhood-appropriate architecture and size.

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM), as identified in the Comprehensive Plan, identifies uses within the community as mostly residential. Larger properties within this classification are frequently subject to minor subdivisions (the partitioning of a parcel into five or fewer smaller parcels.) These minor subdivisions should be evaluated for the possibility of population and related municipal cost increases associated with utility and infrastructure improvements.

Figure 52 is the future land use for the BIS Neighborhood. Figure 53, on the following page, shows what the future land use was for the northern portion of BIS prior to an amendment in 2007.

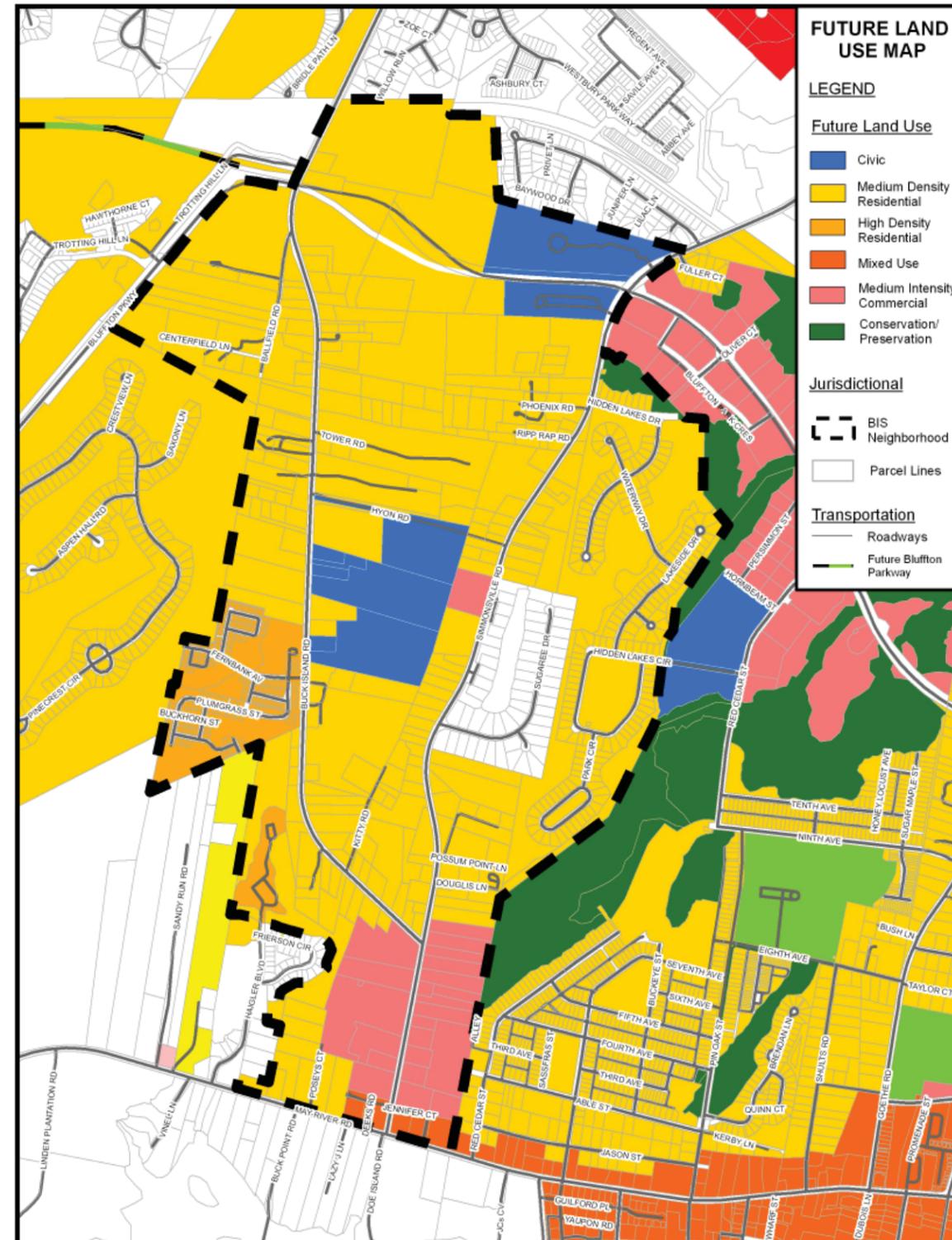


Figure 52: Future land use for the BIS Neighborhood

Areas of commercial land use have been identified to be located primarily along the southern portion of Buck Island Road. Institutional and civic uses have been identified as remaining on the Bluffton Middle School site and the County waste transfer site. It is important that the Town work to minimize the impact that additional civic or institutional facilities may have on the BIS Neighborhood.

Although the BIS Neighborhood is primarily residential in character, its perimeter contains commercial activity and applications for additional commercial development continue to be submitted to the Town. The application of the Buck Island Square property located at the southwestern corner of Bluffton Parkway and Buck Island Road that was requesting a rezoning, has recently been withdrawn. It appears, at this point, that the Buck Island Square property will be used as residential housing. The pending application of the Old Carolina Shopping Center property located at the northeastern corner of this same intersection proposes using a mixture of residential and commercial structures, including a gas station and grocery store. **Figure 54 shows the locations of these two properties.**

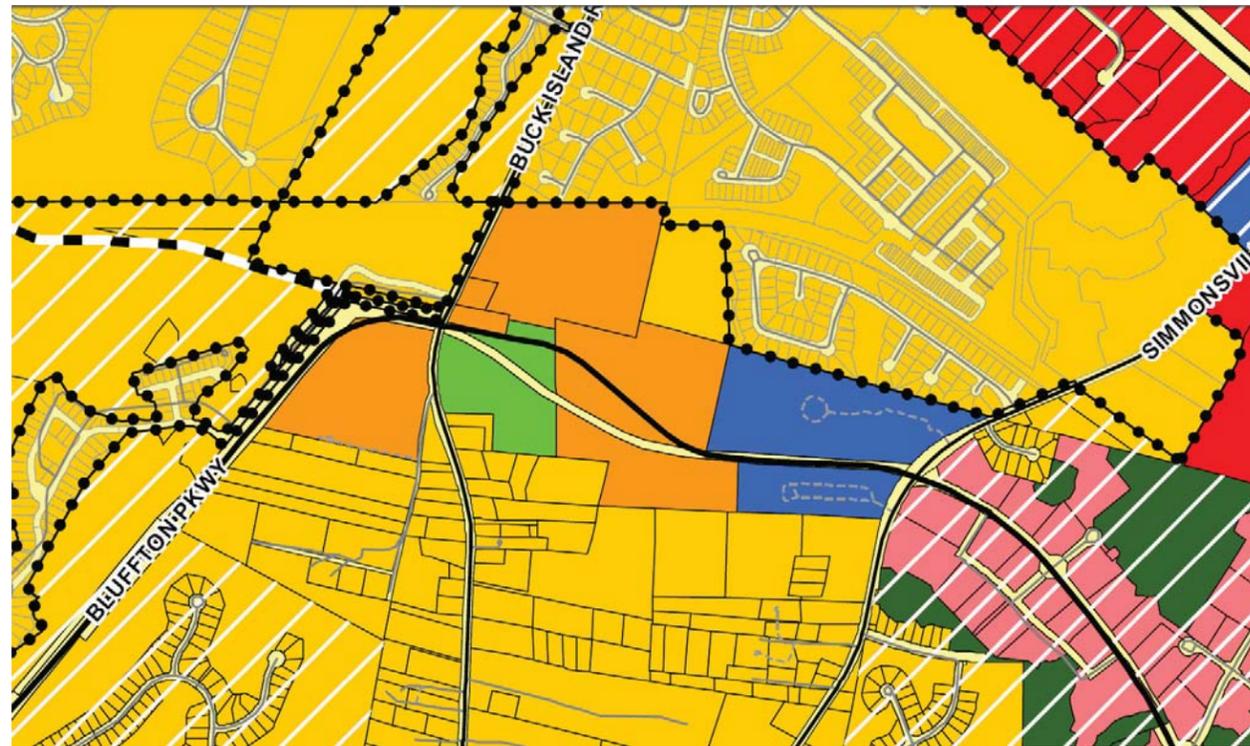


Figure 53: The darker orange represents high-density residential in this 2007 Future Land Use Map. The official map was amended in the Spring of 2007, changing the classification to medium-density residential, as shown in Figure 53.

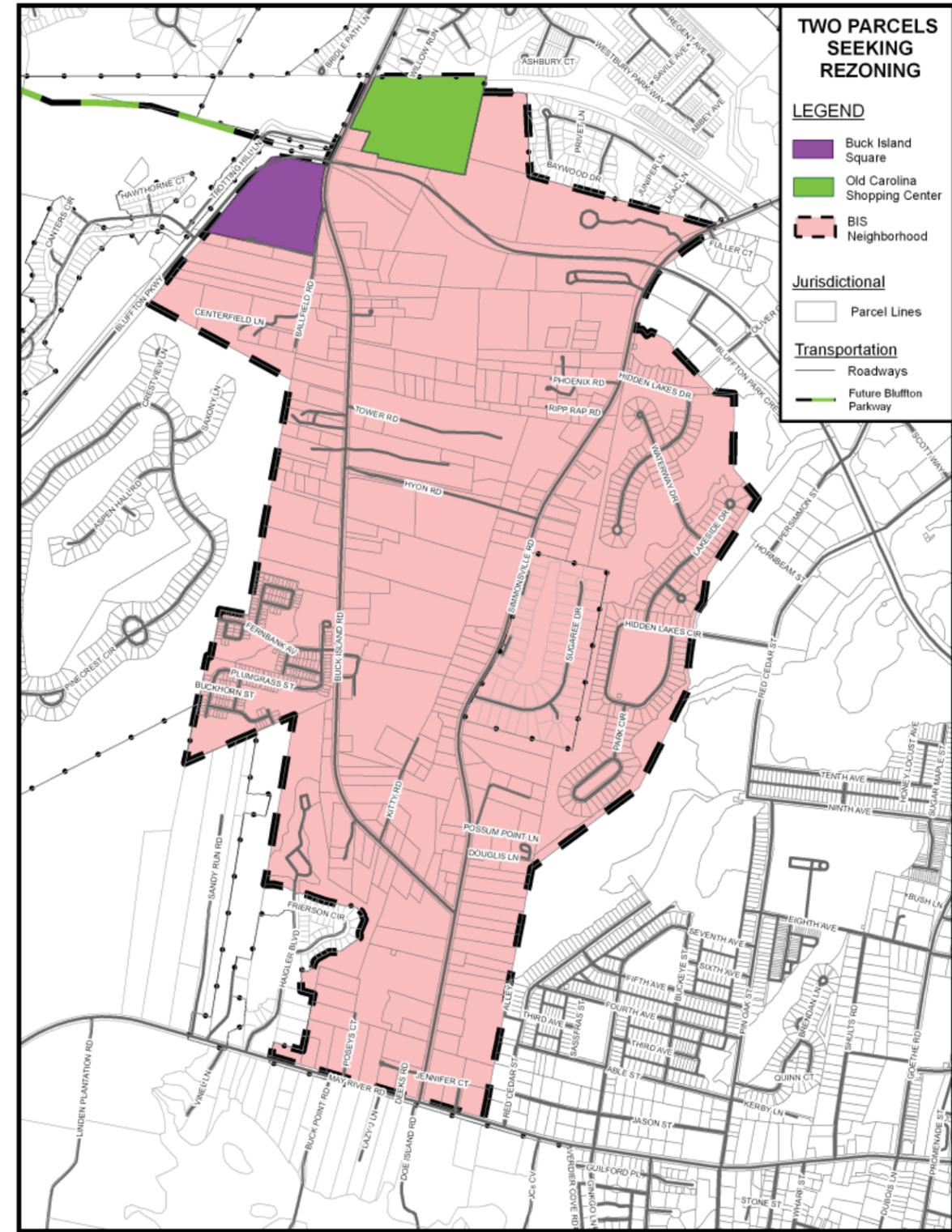


Figure 54: Buck Island Square (withdrawn) and Old Carolina Square locations

Throughout the planning process, BIS residents continually voiced concerns over the Buck Island Square and Old Carolina projects. They cited concerns about increased traffic on already inadequate roadways, increases in property taxes, and incompatibility with the existing neighborhood in terms of character and land use intensity. See Figures 55 and 56 for the proposed site plans. It is vital that the Town staff, Planning Commission, and Town Council carefully assess the impact of rezoning requests. A careful assessment should help ensure compatibility with the existing neighborhood, thus helping to fulfill the needs and objectives of the BIS Neighborhood Plan. Due to the proximity to the predominately low to medium density residential uses prevalent on adjacent properties, these properties should remain at a zoning designation of General Residential at this time.

There are numerous vacant properties throughout the Neighborhood that will eventually be filled with residential homes. Many of these properties are located in the interior portion of the Neighborhood, with no access to public roadways and are landlocked. Relying on the current road layout will result in every property having a curb cut or private drive off of Buck Island or Simonsville roads. In order to avoid creating excessive curb cuts and private drives, additional connector roads may be warranted. There has been discussion about the need for a new north-south road from the Bluffton Parkway that runs parallel to Buck Island and Simonsville roads. This road would take traffic off of the main roads and open up these landlocked properties for development, something that may not be supported by the greater community.

Bluffton's population continues to increase, and the population inside the BIS Neighborhood is no exception. Based on existing zoning in the Neighborhood, it is conceivable that 565 residential homes could be built. In order to limit the adverse impacts of residential buildout on the community, the current road layout may need to be improved to include additional connections. This is critical to maintaining a sustainable community.

Any future rezoning requests should be carefully reviewed by Town staff, Planning Commission, and Town Council ensure proposed development is in harmony with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan and the land use intensity and character of the Neighborhood. It should be noted, however, that some degree of commercial development within the BIS Neighborhood area could help in procuring funding for requested area improvements such as pathways, road widenings, and sewer/water line extensions.

Similarly, some properly-scaled neighborhood commercial businesses at the perimeter of the BIS Neighborhood could actually be a convenience for residents, like Bluffton Station.

If such rezonings are approved through public process, the Town should work with the respective developers to ensure that the projects are aimed at fulfilling community needs while also fitting into the BIS neighborhood's character context. These developments should consist of a mix of housing styles and price points and contain neighborhood commercial that is pedestrian-oriented and limited to a village scale retail and service.

It is important that these developments also consider the need for additional community facilities to be utilized by residents of the study area, including but not limited to community centers, active and passive parks offering a variety of programming opportunities, pathways, and civic uses, all amidst a pedestrian-oriented streetscape.

BUCK ISLAND SQUARE ALTERNATE LAND PLAN

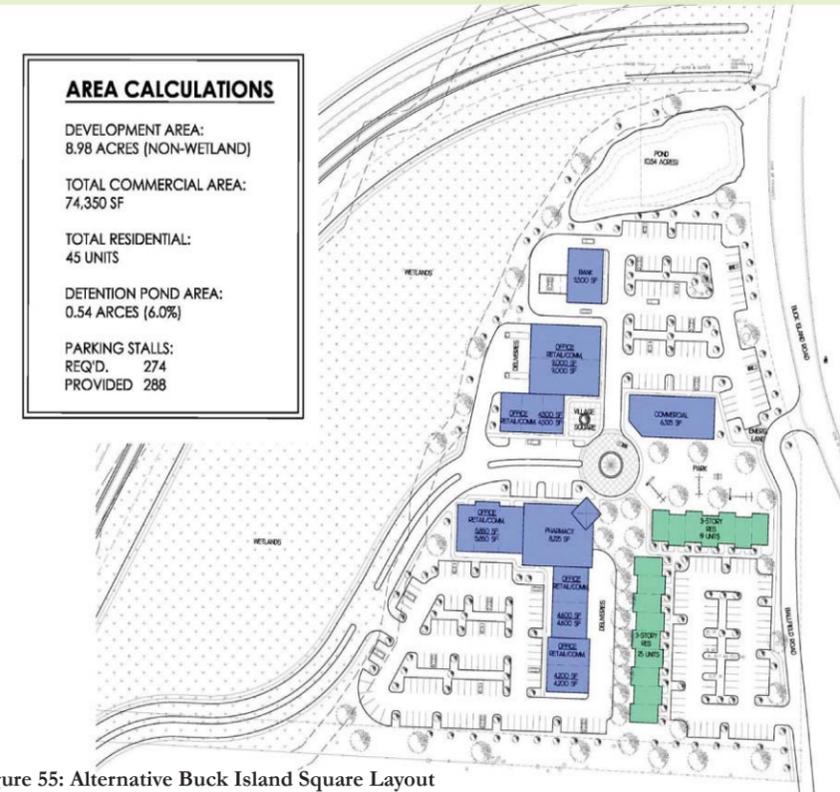


Figure 55: Alternative Buck Island Square Layout

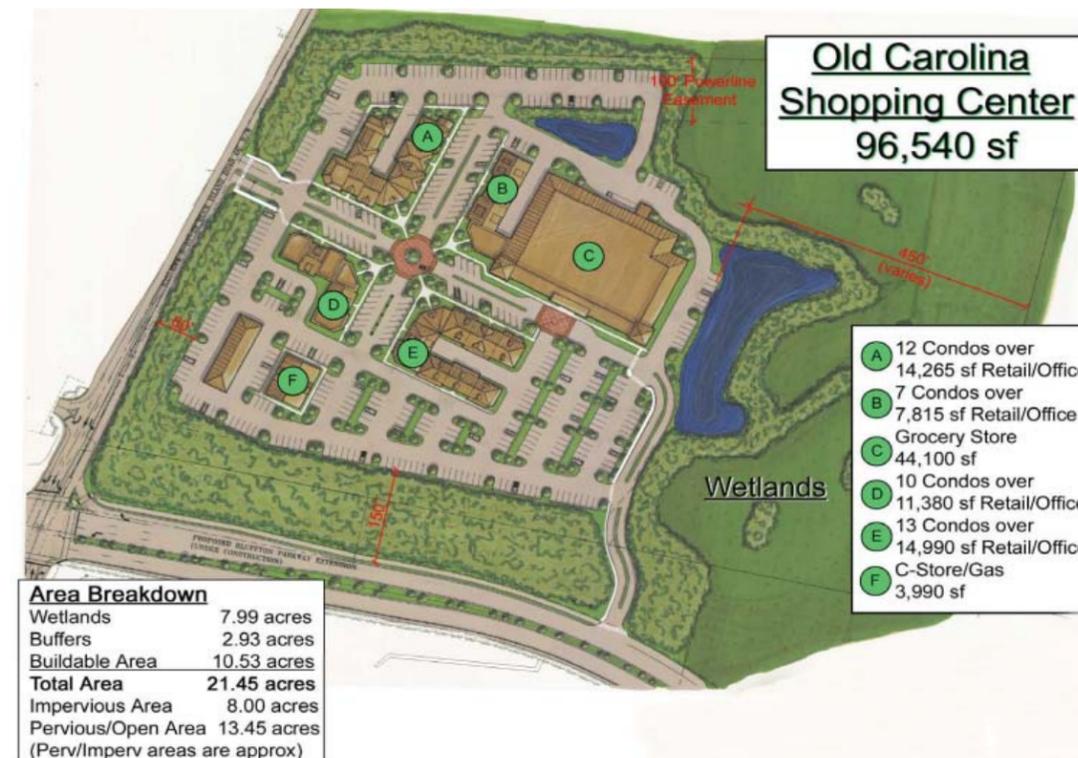


Figure 56: Old Carolina Shopping Center illustrative site plan

Land uses around and south of the Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road intersection should be limited to residential or village scale commercial uses. Due to current zoning designations of Village Commercial District (VCD), the nearby presence of a large employer in RSI, and the retail/service development of Bluffton Station, this intersection has the opportunity to become a true gateway node of commercial designed for the enjoyment and convenience of the entire Neighborhood.

Currently, a 7.3 acre site is for sale within the Village Commercial District. It is situated directly east of the Buck Island-Simmonsville split and could ultimately become the low-scale commercial and residential center focused specifically on providing employment opportunities and goods/services for the BIS Neighborhood. Figure 58 shows a conceptual design for this property.



Figure 57: This property represents a great opportunity for a neighborhood center and gateway into the community, and is already zoned for such.



Figure 58: Conceptual 7.3 AC Village Commercial at Buck Island Rd/ Simmonsville Rd intersection

The BIS Neighborhood has ample vacant and under utilized land that can be developed in a positive manner to revitalize the community. There are dozens of small single-family lots that are vacant or contain rental manufactured homes. The highest and best use for these parcels is single family homes or duplexes. This type of infill development should be sought via partnership between the Town and interested property owners. Modular or prefabricated homes are relatively inexpensive and can easily be placed on these properties. These quality built structures provide a safer and more cost efficient home for tenants, while also improving the appearance of the neighborhood that will ultimately leverage additional investment. **Figures 59 through 61 show how infill works with the existing neighborhood to help improve current conditions and provide additional housing.**

Figure 62 shows vacant properties of the BIS Neighborhood. Local builders should also be considered for these small infill projects through a joint-venture agreement with the property owner. The builder provides the house and the property owner provides the land so that they are partners in the development and will share in the sale or rent of the property/house on a pro-rata basis. The Town can facilitate these partnerships and provide additional incentives as necessary.

Larger redevelopment sites are also plentiful and should be marketed as such with the property owner's permission. For example, the 13.7 acre Little Possum/Douglas properties could be redeveloped with up to 30 new affordable homes in a quality-designed neighborhood with proper utilities and infrastructure. To ensure that the new dwelling units are not cost-prohibitive for the local workforce, financial assistance and incentives should be sought from the Town and its affordable housing partners. Other potential large redevelopment sites include the Ballfield Road area and Twin Oaks. **Figure 63 shows these larger redevelopment properties.**



Figures 59-61: Vacant single-family lots represent great infill opportunities throughout the Neighborhood.

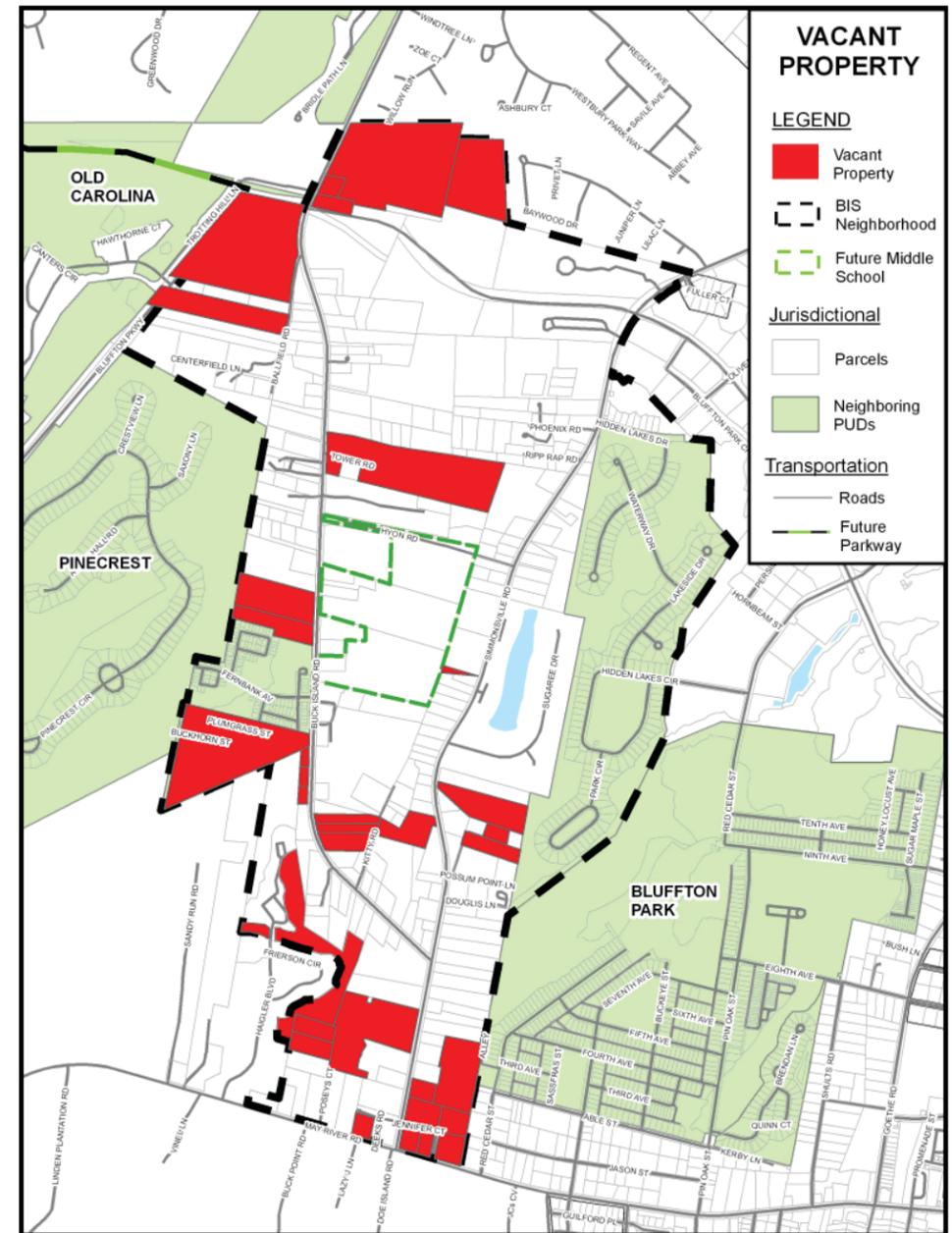


Figure 62: Vacant property locations in the BIS Neighborhood.

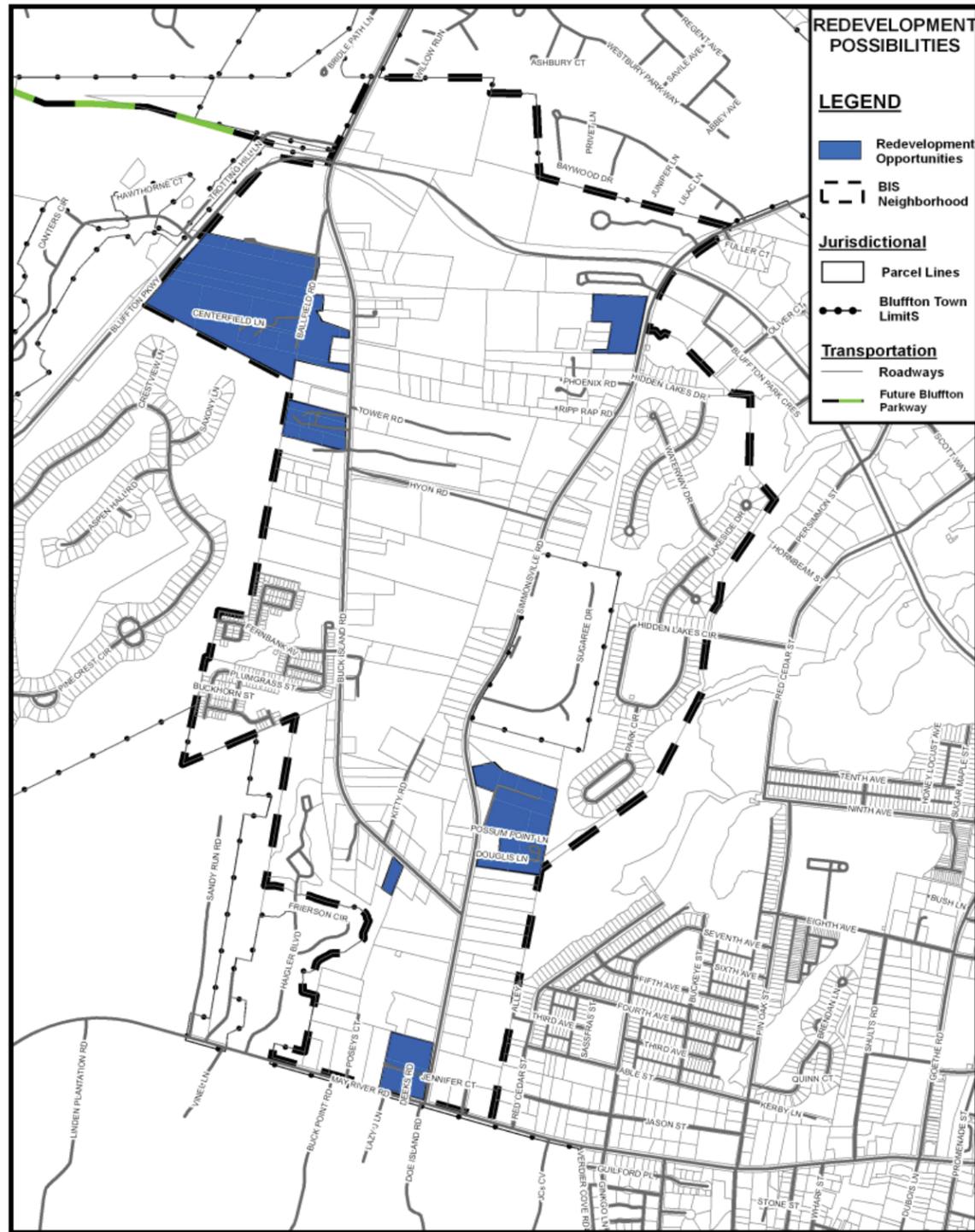


Figure 63: Areas best suited for redevelopment.

planning, zoning, & development recommendations

Encourage the demolition of buildings that cannot be rehabilitated at a reasonable cost	TOB, PO
Restrict new flag lots	TOB
Review and strengthen parking standards, promoting the use of shared parking to reduce the quantity of parking lots while ensuring that adequate parking is appropriately placed and provided.	TOB
Review the ZDSO to ensure that requirements provide for adequate screening of commercial/industrial uses to adjacent residential structures.	TOB, PO
Require small-scale signage for any business within the Neighborhood Plan area.	TOB, PO
Work with the property owner and listing agent of the 7.3 acre VCD property site near the Buck Island Rd/Simmons Rd intersection to market appropriate redevelopment	TOB, AC, PO
Seek redevelopment opportunity for small infill properties	TOB, PO
Restrict commercial, industrial, and large-scale multi-family development in the core of the Neighborhood	TOB
Mandate pathway contributions through easement donations or outright construction requirements (ordinance revision)	TOB, PO, NO
In partnership with the property owners and community leaders, seek redevelopment opportunities in the communities of Little Possum, Douglis Lane, Twin Oaks, and Ballfield Road.	TOB, PO
Assist heirs property owners to obtain clear title to their land	TOB, PO
Identify parcels with adjacent conflicting land uses and develop beautification/screening plans for each	TOB, PO
Review the ZDSO to ensure that adverse impacts from residential buildout will be minimized (lack of connector roads)	TOB
Ensure that Old Carolina Shopping Center is developed as residential	TOB

KEY:
 AC-Advisory Committee; BC-Beaufort County; BCSD-Beaufort County School District; NO-Neighborhood Organization; PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

chapter 4: parks & recreation

Recreation and open space add economic, social, environmental, and aesthetic value to neighborhoods. Well-planned spaces can promote community investment, educate citizens about the environment, contribute to a community's unique character, and create a sense of place by linking surrounding structures.

Within BIS, the opportunity exists to provide park spaces that are accessible, attractive, and appropriately programmed via collaboration among the local schools and residents. The Town should work in partnership with Beaufort County Parks and Leisure Services (PALS) to identify areas within the Neighborhood that could accommodate a future park or recreational facility.

It may be pertinent to explore the possibility of acquiring portions of BIS's major central wetland system for use as an interpretive park consisting of boardwalks and nature trails. This partnership could also be used to foster community summer camps and recreational programs. For example, Red Cedar Elementary School, located within Bluffton Park, is exploring the possibility of educational programs centering on interpretation of wildlife within the proposed man-made wetland park at the B-11 site, positioned south of the school along Red Cedar Street. The opportunity exists at the Bluffton Middle School site to incorporate a similar interpretative program within the open space and wetland system that lie on and adjacent to the middle school property.

When the new Bluffton Middle School opens in 2010, it can provide traditional recreational opportunities for the Neighborhood. Likewise, the new Red Cedar Elementary School in Bluffton Park is within easy walking distance to the BIS Neighborhood, as long as connecting pathways or sidewalks are developed. The Beaufort County School District allows for the utilization of recreational facilities for all schools under its jurisdiction through a recreational use policy. The Town should work with the School District and other developers to ensure pathways and sidewalks are available to access these facilities. The Town should continue working collaboratively with Beaufort County PALS,

the Beaufort County School District, and not-for-profit organizations to provide improved access to neighborhood facilities for community services, programs, and activities.

Within the BIS Neighborhood, there is one recreational facility – the Bluffton Eagles ball field. The Bluffton Eagles ball field, owned by the non-profit Bluffton Eagles Community Action Committee, hosts baseball games, community dinners, and community events. Owners of the ball field have met with the Town and neighborhood residents and are committed to improving and modifying the ball field for future community use. **Figure 64 shows the proposed enhancements.**



Figure 64: The proposed enhancements to the Bluffton Eagles Baseball Field.

Proposed improvements include enhancing the existing adult baseball field by re-orienting the field to allow for additional seating, concession areas, and rest rooms. The enhancements also include additional areas for barbecue pits and eating areas to better serve the community as a year-round gathering location, as well as the additions of a new little league baseball field, a fitness trail with interpretive botanical gardens, and a 4,000 square foot community center. The additional investment in this field will lead to an increase in recreational programs and enhance the accessibility and capacity of an existing facility that has great potential as a community gathering space.

There are other recreational facilities and open space areas located outside of the BIS Neighborhood that are also open for public use. Buckwalter Community Park is a 103.3 acre regional park located along the Buckwalter Parkway. The park will consist of a variety of recreational opportunities including athletic fields, a community recreation center, three baseball fields, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and pathways. These pathways should be linked to pathways along Bluffton Parkway to allow for easy pedestrian access from the BIS Neighborhood to the regional park. Oscar Frazier Park and Oyster Factory Park both combine functional open space with a variety of recreational activities. **Figure 65 shows park and school locations in and around the BIS Neighborhood.**

The recently constructed extension of Bluffton Parkway through the northern portion of the Neighborhood provides pathways for recreational and pedestrian use. These pathways are connected to a larger, growing system of interconnected linkages that allow for non-vehicular movement throughout the Town of Bluffton. The expansion of this pathway system along Buck Island Road and Simmonsville Road would provide for additional recreational opportunities, as well as provide pedestrian travel throughout the Neighborhood in a much safer manner than what currently exists.

parks & recreation recommendations

Enhance Eagles Field with proposed improvements to the existing field, a new little league field, a community center, and other recreational features in partnership with not-for-profit entities and ensure that the park is open to BIS residents during normal operation hours unless otherwise reserved	TOB, EF, AC, PO
Identify locations for new open space/park land	TOB, PO
Identify environmentally sensitive land and ensure that it remains protected	TOB, PO
Ensure that the school site is open to the BIS community- establish a written commitment	TOB, PO, BCSD
Create interpretive wetland trails throughout the Neighborhood	TOB,PO

KEY:
 AC-Advisory Committee; BC-Beaufort County; BCSD-Beaufort County School District; NO-Neighborhood Organization; PO-Property Owners; SCDOT-SC Department of Transportation; TOB-Town of Bluffton

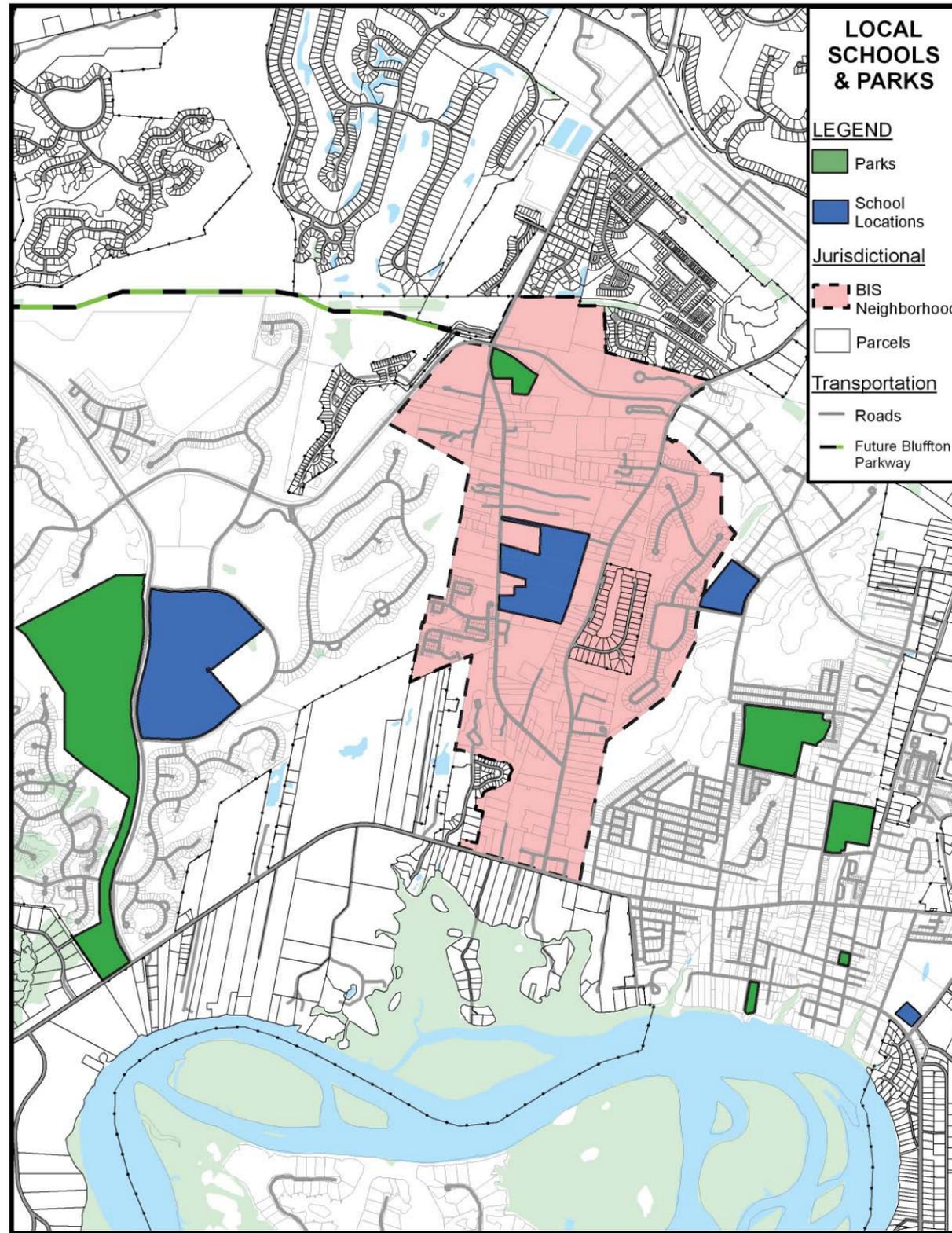


Figure 65: School and park locations within walking distance of the BIS Neighborhood, if pathway connections were made.